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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 003233

SIPDIS

FOR LTG WHITCOMB FROM THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/14/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [YM](#) [COUNTER TERRORISM](#)

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR LTG WHITCOMB'S VISIT TO SANAA

Classified By: CDA NABEEL KHOURY, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) Welcome to Sanaa. We have requested meetings for you with Minister of Defense MG Abdullah Ali Aliwa, Minister of Interior Rashad Mohammed al-Alimi, and Commander of the Yemeni Special Operations Forces (YSOF) Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh. Chief of Staff MG Mohammed al-Qassemi is currently in the United States for medical treatment.

2. (C) You will find these officials anxious to discuss what they characterize as excellent but inadequate U.S. assistance to support what they view as Yemen's role in the GWOT. They will likely express some disappointment that President Saleh's visit to Washington last week did not result in an agreement to substantially increase military assistance. MOD officials may complain that the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) system, with which they are just now developing some familiarity, is too slow, cumbersome and difficult, and may make an appeal for rapid and direct transfers of equipment, spare parts, and cash -- something the Office of Military Cooperation (OMC) has repeatedly made clear is not possible. You should expect a more congenial meeting with the Minister of Interior whose open and cooperative attitude has enabled MOI to maximize training and FMF opportunities.

COOPERATION AT ARM'S LENGTH

3. (C) Although Yemen remains an important regional partner in the GWOT with a post-9/11 string of CT successes, cooperation on this front has not been perfect -- a point that was made clear to President Saleh during his visit to Washington. He and his ministers often claim that they have "done everything asked of them," that they are "fighting our fight" in the GWOT, but that USG assistance has not been commensurate with their efforts. In fact, ROYG CT cooperation is spotty, and is tinged with mistrust, often leading to the hoarding of information both between ROYG agencies and between the ROYG and the USG. You may want to press your interlocutors to use the recently created MOD Working Group and the MOD's new 3-5 year CT and Border Security Plan as the basis for greater, routine information sharing. You may want to make the point that, while the Yemenis often respond to requests for information at the very highest levels, close partners should not wait for arms to be twisted before sharing useful data on a common enemy. You may particularly wish to impress upon the Minister of Defense and the YSOF commander, who is also the President's son, on the need for direct, continuing engagement between U.S. military trainers and YSOF units.

SMALL ARMS/LIGHT WEAPONS

4. (C) For decades, President Saleh has performed a delicate balancing act between competing military, tribal, and Islamist interests, and has masterfully used USG assistance as a major point of leverage. While many of the aspects of this internal politicking are invisible to us, one is particularly threatening to Yemeni and international security: the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SA/LW). Saleh and his ministers are aware that weapons ostensibly procured through official MOD channels have ended up in the hands of terrorists in Saudi Arabia, Somalia and elsewhere. The President pledged privately in March to stop relying on arms dealers to equip his armed forces, and, at our insistence, made the pledge public in November. There is no evidence thus far that the message has been received by weapons brokers, who continue to purchase arms abroad.

5. (C) You should make clear to the Minister of Defense that it is simply too dangerous for our diplomatic presence in the region, for our troops in Iraq, as well as for the Saleh regime to allow the arms trade to continue. We are willing to help the ROYG monitor the flow of arms, but there must be a high-level acceptance of our repeated offers to build a weapons inventory system for the ROYG. You may wish to press the Minister of Defense on this issue, perhaps by requesting that we start at the unit level and work up from there.

INTERNAL POLITICS

16. (C) Your visit comes against the backdrop of the beginning of the campaign season for Yemen's presidential and local council elections, which are scheduled to take place next year. Saleh has announced that he will not seek a third term, but most observers expect the ruling party to formally nominate him at their general conference in December -- and for Saleh to reluctantly accept. At that point, Saleh is expected to name a caretaker cabinet until the elections, a long overdue move that will alter the political landscape, but will not likely have a major impact on the ROYG's foreign, defense or CT policies. It is not clear to us if the ministers with whom you are scheduled to meet will see a change in their portfolios as a result of this re-shuffling; they may not know themselves at this point and for that reason may be more cautious than usual in their interactions with you.

17. (C) Your meetings offer an important opportunity to firmly reinforce the message President Saleh heard in Washington about the need for better cooperation on CT efforts to safeguard Yemen's stability. Previous U.S.-Yemeni CT cooperation offers a good foundation, but it is critical that Yemen make the transition from ad hoc cooperation to a fully developed partnership. The ROYG needs to make verifiable commitments to stopping the arms trade and routinizing information sharing. Your support for this approach will be helpful indeed.

Khoury